

# Managing coronavirus (but not the kind you get after a big weekend)



The media is in a frenzy about the coronavirus which has hit our shores. Despite reassurance from health authorities that it's not yet a pandemic, employers shouldn't forget they are required to have a safe system of work in place.

To avoid fighting off a catastrophic virus like in the 2011 film Contagion (no prizes for guessing how it ends), employers should act diligently to not only protect their workers, but to benefit the broader Australian public during this time of uncertainty.

To complicate matters, employers have the difficult task of ensuring the health and safety of their workers, without discriminating against workers who have recently travelled to China. Luckily, employers have a few options.

As a starting point, employers should consider collaborating with medical professionals in order to implement effective safety measures and precautions in the workplace, and to better understand the risks associated with this latest outbreak.

If a worker returns sick from a trip to China they should access their accrued personal leave or take unpaid sick leave. If they're clearly sick, in denial and resist taking leave (there's always that one culprit in open-plan working), employers can direct them to undertake a medical assessment to ensure they are fit to attend work (if their employment contract allows).

Things however, get a bit trickier if workers have recently travelled to China but are feeling healthy and well.

Even if the well-travelled workers aren't sick, employers should consider keeping them away from work to protect other workers. While it might seem a bit extreme, quarantining workers at home might not be difficult or counterproductive if working from home arrangements can be used.

In taking a stricter view towards health and safety obligations, employers may choose to direct employees to take annual leave for a reasonable period to be sure they don't develop the virus at a later date.

While we shouldn't succumb to the social media panic, employers should still take the coronavirus outbreak seriously and ensure their workplace is safe.

Questions? Give us a call.



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